

# Labeled Individuals: The Influence of Stereotypes on Communication between American and Non-American Students

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**INTRODUCTION:** Skin shades, gender, country of origin, accents, and even our names make a big difference in how we are perceived, welcomed, beaten up, appreciated, or degraded. All of us might have been carrying a scar of being labeled or stereotyped unfairly at some point in our life, and some of us may have more scars and cuts. This paper focuses on the negative stereotypic images specifically between American and non-American students. It grows out of my research and personal experiences during my M.A studies at Wichita State as an international student.

**PURPOSE:** To study the negative influence of stereotypes on interpersonal communication between American and international students. To give public awareness to reduce the number of the victims of labeling.

**METHODS:** Surveys taken by American (N=50) and international (N=50) students at WSU. Thirteen other individuals with different nationalities were interviewed for their authentic personal experiences of being stereotyped. Findings are supported by qualitative and quantitative research methods.

**RESULTS:** About 82% of international and 68% of the American students have experienced negative stereotypes at WSU. None of the international students showed ethnocentrism versus 32% of the Americans who felt superiority. Language, cultural differences, hygiene concerns, lack of travel, and media impacts are main reasons for American students to avoid communicating with international students. Two-third of international student find communication challenging with American students. Middle-Eastern and African-Americans are labeled as the most challenging groups for the Americans. International students had the most difficulty with African-Americans (42%), white Americans (30%), and Hispanics (18%) to communicate with. 78 % of international students believe they put more effort into establishing interactions with American students.

**CONCLUSION:** This study highlights the negative influences of stereotyping on communication between American and International students. Stereotypes affected the quality and quantity of communication between the students. Majority of the participants reported being unfairly stereotyped, although this was more obvious among the internationals. The American students have also felt insecure when communicating with international students. Negative stereotypes are mostly tied to racial and cultural differences and media impact. The study emphasizes people should be seen as individuals, to avoid being victims of categorization and negative stereotypic labels. Expanding positive perceptions of American students toward international students increases interaction and interpersonal communication. Meanwhile, international students should work more on their language and adaptation to new culture and communication experiences.